

Subjects and verbs are said to “agree” when they are *the same in number*. This means that singular nouns must have singular verbs and plural nouns must have plural verbs. This basic principle is easy to demonstrate:

My **brother is** a ballet dancer.

My **sisters are** airline pilots.

Difficulty arises when using words that are confusing in number (eg. everyone, all) and when phrases come between the subject and verb. To ensure subject-verb agreement, one must correctly identify the subject and verb of the sentence, and then find the form of each that will accomplish numerical agreement. The examples given below will outline and clarify this process.

Basic Agreement

In most sentences, the noun of the subject and the verb are obvious and occur next to each other. The noun is the person, place, or thing that the sentence is “about.” The verb is the action that the subject “performs” (including “being”).

Sally (noun) loves (verb) cheesecake.

Sally is a singular noun needing a singular verb. Many singular verbs are formed by adding “-s” or “-es.”

The students love their teacher.

The students are a group of people, and most verbs are plural without “-s” or “-es.”

Modifying Phrases

Sometimes phrases beginning with a preposition, gerund, or relative pronoun will come between the subject and the verb, obscuring the number of the noun.

The flock of birds is flying high.

The basket holding ten eggs is on the table.



